

Finding God in the Changes

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Musicians know that even the best melodies can quickly become usual and expected. So to bring emphasis, movement and depth to a song, they add a key change. This allows the song to take on a whole new life, and we hear its melodies in a fresh way.

Recently, God added a key change to the song of my life. After helping start a new church in St. Petersburg Florida, I sensed it was time to step out of local church ministry in order to focus on helping people and organizations in the area of spiritual formation.

As much as I anticipated this change, I also found it threatening. I have been a pastor for 15 years. It has been my daily life, what I do and what I know. My professional network, career goals and personal development all orbited in some way around local church ministry. I initially blamed my anxiety over practical concerns, like shifts in income or office setup. But as I interrogated my thoughts more deeply, I realized there was another issue in play: I was hiding.

It's a cliché that we know all too well: "People don't like change." True enough, we often greet change like cold feet in a warm bed. Even if we dislike our status quo, it is still predictable and quantifiable. It gives us a measure of control and security — a wonderfully miserable place to hide.

God seeks us in our confused, misdirected state, and reveals himself to us anew. As to Adam and Eve in the garden, God calls out to us in our hiding, "Where are you?"

Here are some ways that I found God — or perhaps that God found me — in the change:

I am not my vocation, even if it is my calling. My ministry calling had become my job. I was measuring my spirituality by program successes and failures. I rated myself in comparison to my ministry colleagues. God reminded me that I am first his child, and second his instrument.

God is speaking, to me. I had reached a point where all my interaction with God flowed through the filter of "how can I use this in ministry?" I had become myopic, focusing primarily on what the church could apply. My change revealed that God had some things to say to me, and to me alone.

God is inviting me to genuinely connect with other people. As a pastor, it is so easy to initiate with people on the basis of the institution and how best to assimilate them into church programs. This had created an artificial agenda to connecting with others that I found dissatisfying, limiting and somewhat "plastic." I have learned — once again — the powerful and compelling reality of human connection on its own merits.

God is calling me to be quiet. Adding new changes to an already full life can be overwhelming. But with the change came the opportunity to reprioritize my "stuff," which allows me to safeguard the quiet spaces where God reveals himself most intimately.

All these and more have reminded me that God's primary purpose in us is, in fact, *change*. A change of identity. A change of nature. A change of community. A change of truth. A change of destiny. A change of experience. A change of heart. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

To grow *is* to change, and to remain in the status quo is to be comatose: neither living nor dying; only existing. Embracing change brings awareness of God, alertness to him and the new mercies he brings each day. Most of all, change encourages us. It reminds us that there is more to come; there is more to discover.

Our life-song is still being written.